

Application for Property Transfer
under the Operation Goodwill Initiative

**57th and Division
School/Neighborhood Community Center
Portland, Oregon**

September 16, 2005

Proposal: Federal government transfer of ownership of the property at 5633 S.E. Division St., Portland, Oregon to Southeast Uplift Neighborhood Program, Inc.

Southeast Uplift Neighborhood Program, Inc (SEUL) is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization that, since the 1970s, has served as the formal neighborhood coalition office for inner southeast Portland. SEUL is operated by a board of directors made up of volunteer representatives from the 20 inner-southeast Portland neighborhood associations, local business associations, and community-based organizations. SEUL provides technical assistance in citizen participation, community development, organizing and urban planning.

SEUL proposes to take ownership of the property in cooperation with Atkinson Elementary School PTA, the Mt. Tabor Neighborhood Association and the South Tabor Neighborhood Association. This proposal is an unusual collaborative effort by an elementary school PTA and two neighborhood associations to meet the civic and social needs of our growing and changing community. The purpose is to acquire and develop a former drug crime property into a vibrant and valuable community gathering place and community service facility.

A steering committee with representatives from SEUL, Atkinson Elementary School, the two neighborhoods associations, and other community interests will oversee the improvement, management, and maintenance of the property. Steering committee members bring to the project a wide range of professional and volunteer experience in public and private sector project management and organizational leadership. In addition a number of community members currently are—and will continue to—contribute their guidance and services in the area of building and site design, development planning, construction, fundraising, legal advice, and administrative management.

Purpose: To transform a former drug property and community liability into a positive, community-owned, school/neighborhood center.

The proposed community center will create a gathering place and civic hub for the surrounding community. No such community-oriented facility exists nearby. Atkinson Elementary School across the street will use the facility to provide a range of services to its low-income and immigrant families and to support the school's many volunteer projects and activities. Community groups and individuals will use the community room and meeting facilities. (Additional detail on the proposed school and community uses for the site is included below.)

This community-building project is strongly supported by school and neighborhood community members and local elected officials. The project also is supported by the Division Vision Coalition steering committee members—Division Vision is a broad-based business/neighborhood community planning and revitalization process for Division St. Division Vision leaders view this project as a pilot project for on of the group's key goals—providing a greater community voice and direct involvement in directing neighborhood revitalization.

BACKGROUND

Property Description: The 14,040 sq. ft. property is located at 5633 S.E. Division St. in inner southeast Portland, Oregon. It lies directly across the street from Atkinson Elementary School and across a sports field from Franklin High School. The property was used until the 1980s as a gas

station. After that, the property was owned by a series of different members of the same family. Family members operated a variety of businesses on the site, including mini-markets, a video arcade, and a string of used car lots. The property includes a 967 square-foot, one-story structure—most recently used as a mini-mart—and a small tool shed.

The property lies within the boundary of the Mt. Tabor Neighborhood Association (MTNA). The MTNA was founded in 1974 and is home to over 10,000 residents. Atkinson Elementary School lies within the boundary of the South Tabor Neighborhood Association (STNA). The STNA was founded in 1973 and is home to over 6,000 residents. Both neighborhood associations are formally recognized as representing their communities by the City of Portland. The neighborhood associations derive their tax exempt status through their affiliation with SEUL. The Atkinson PTA serves as the formal parent-teacher support organization for the school. The PTA has its own 501(c)3 status.

Past Problems at the Site: Community members have been concerned and alarmed for many years about recurring criminal and other unwelcome activity on the property. Hundreds of children pass the property every day on their way to and from Atkinson Elementary School, Clinton Park across the street, and the very popular Dairy Queen next door—a 35-year, neighborhood institution.

Problems over the years have included drug deals, loitering, a stabbing, laundering food stamps, vandalism, arson, and sales of cigarettes to minors.

In the early 1990s, then Atkinson Elementary School principal John Withers championed the idea of acquiring the problem site and developing it into a true community asset—a community gathering place that would serve both the school and the surrounding neighborhood. The opportunity to realize John's dream arrived in 2003.

Opportunity to Acquire the Property: Federal agents arrested the property owner in the summer of 2003 and charged him with illegally selling pseudo ephedrine to local methamphetamine labs. The next day, community members contacted the U.S. Attorney's office in Portland, Oregon. Community members have been working collaboratively with staff of the U.S. Attorney's office in Portland and the Multnomah County Sheriff to seek the transfer the property to community ownership.

The property owner pled guilty and was sentenced in February 2005, at which time the federal government took formal ownership of the property.

Who Will Own the Site?: The Southeast Uplift Neighborhood Program, Inc. will take ownership of the site on behalf of the Atkinson PTA and Mt. Tabor and South Tabor Neighborhood Associations. The SEUL board of directors formally approved taking ownership of the property on Monday, February 7, 2005, with the condition that adequate liability insurance must be obtained for the site.

Southeast Uplift Neighborhood Program, Inc. is a 501.c(3) non-profit organization that serves the coalition of 20 formal neighborhood associations in southeast and northeast Portland south of Interstate 84 (Tax ID #: 93-0690723.). Southeast Uplift was founded by community members in 1968, and since the 1970s has served as the formal neighborhood coalition office for inner southeast Portland. SEUL is operated by a board of directors made up of volunteer representatives from the 20 inner-southeast Portland neighborhood and business associations, and community-based organizations. SEUL provides free technical assistance in citizen participation, community development, organizing and urban planning. The City of Portland contracts with SEUL to provide support services to its neighborhood associations. SEUL has extensive experience managing grants and community programs. SEUL owns and operates its own office building, which houses the SEUL offices and leases office space to other non-profits. SEUL acts as the fiscal sponsor to a variety of community projects and organizations. SEUL also has served as fiscal sponsor for the Lents/Brentwood Darlington Weed and Seed site in Portland (\$225,000 per year from 2000 to 2005).

SEUL's formal mission is: "To assist the citizens and neighborhood associations of Southeast Portland to create communities which are livable, socially diverse, safe and vital. Southeast Uplift provides an organizational structure and forum to empower citizens to effectively resolve issues of livability and community development."

Project Steering Committee: A steering committee of community leaders formed in 2003 to guide and advocate for this community project. The steering committee will raise the funds for the property acquisition, environmental cleanup, operation, and future expansion, and will advise SEUL on the management of the site. The steering committee currently includes:

Chris Gutierrez

- principal, Atkinson Elementary School

Dave Hilts

- chair, land use committee, Mt. Tabor Neighborhood Association

Phil Jackson

- site council member, Franklin High School

Paul Leistner (steering committee convener)

- vice president, Southeast Uplift Neighborhood Program
- board member and past president, Mt. Tabor Neighborhood Association
- steering committee member, Division Vision Coalition

Linda Nettekoven

- board co-chair, Southeast Uplift Neighborhood Program
- board member, Hosford Abernathy Neighborhood Development (neighborhood association)
- steering committee member, Division Vision Coalition

Kathryn Notson

- board member, South Tabor Neighborhood Association
- steering committee member, Division Vision Coalition

Tim McKenzie

- partner, Burlington Associates in Community Development (community land trust consultant)

Jennifer Pultz

- board member, Mt. Tabor Neighborhood Association
- member, Atkinson PTA

Brian Santo

- past president, Atkinson Elementary School PTA

The steering committee will be expanded to include additional community members with expertise in fundraising, organizational development, and project development will be added as the property transfer to community ownership moves forward.

Future Community Land Trust Option: Steering committee members currently are working with SEUL and individuals in the community who consult with non-profits and community groups on organizational development to explore the opportunity to create a new non-profit community land trust that would act as the vehicle for long-term community ownership, management, and development of the property. The community-service goals laid out in this proposal would serve as the guiding elements of the new entity's charter and the governing body of the entity would mirror the representation of community groups and interests represented in the current steering committee. This community land trust approach could serve as a valuable model for other community groups interested in acquiring community ownership of similar sites around the city and using them to serve community needs.

Initially, the community will use the existing structure on the site to offer a limited schedule of school/neighborhood community center activities. The scope of these activities will be determined in part by the extent and duration of the site disruption during the environmental cleanup. During this initial period, the steering committee will finalize plans to expand the facility to include a wider range of services and serve a broader range of community goals in accordance with the ongoing neighborhood visioning process more fully described below..

Community Involvement: Community members have been involved extensively in defining the vision and goals for this project. In addition to input provided by the project steering committee, over 70 community members shared their ideas in a large community meeting held at Atkinson Elementary School and covered by local TV and newspapers in November 2004.

Thirty five community members also provided specific site, building, and environmental design ideas at a site design workshop in April 2005. The workshop was developed and facilitated by Greenworks, a local environmental design firm, Opsis Architects, and a team of master-degree-level Portland State University (PSU) students in the urban planning program. Workshop participants included staff from the City of Portland Bureau of Planning and Bureau of Environmental Services. Robert Liberty, our district representative on Metro, Portland's elected regional government, also participated. Local TV and radio stations covered the event. The PSU student team has developed a detailed report that captures the ideas and drawings from workshop. (The student team report is available at: http://www.mttaborpdx.org/news/57th_division.html.)

The project has been publicized through coverage in the local news and television media. This coverage has included: articles in Portland's city-wide newspaper, the *Oregonian*, and the community paper for inner southeast Portland, the *Southeast Examiner*. Additional outreach has occurred through local television news stories on three separate stations, radio feature stories, neighborhood association news letters, PTA newsletters, and through communications and broad community workshops held as part of the Division Vision planning process for Division St.

Community Vision for the Site: The vision developed by community members is to create a vibrant and active facility that builds a strong relationship between the school community and the residents in the surrounding neighborhood. As fewer households in Portland have children in public schools, building strong links between schools and their surrounding communities becomes ever more important. The school also provides an important link to the many low-income and immigrant families who are part of the school community.

Community members identified the following key priorities for the project:

- Community Center/Gathering Place that creates a venue for community members to meet and build a stronger sense of community identity and purpose.
- Activity space and meeting rooms for community and school use to provide the infrastructure for community organizing and community-building activities.
- Showcase for innovative environmental design features on a small site, including stormwater management and "green" building techniques.

Benefits to Atkinson Elementary School: Atkinson Elementary School serves a diverse student and family population. Five hundred forty six students attend the school. The school provides a culturally diverse home to many English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) students and a dual-language, Spanish-immersion program. Forty-two percent of Atkinson students speak Chinese, Russian, Spanish, or Vietnamese as their primary language. Instruction occurs in five languages in the school and support-staff help families to participate in their native tongues. Forty-six percent of Atkinson student's qualify for the federal free and reduced cost lunch program. Atkinson's curriculum also includes an outdoor learning component with access to a Wildlife Habitat, Multi-cultural garden and, soon-to-be-complete Outdoor Classroom. Atkinson embraces the idea that the language and culture of every individual enriches the community and fills lives with a great diversity. A major problem for the

school is that the existing school facility is being used to capacity, and no space currently is available in the building to expand community-oriented services.

Atkinson Elementary School administrators and parent leaders have identified a number of ways the project could help meet the needs of the school community, including:

- Gathering and meeting space for the PTA, school volunteer groups, and school orientations.
- Expand existing adult English as a Second Language training for Atkinson parents, many of whom speak Spanish, Vietnamese, Cantonese, and other languages. Trainings could be offered in the community center in the morning right after parents drop off their children. (A current, similar program had to be housed some distance from the school because of a lack of space.)
- Adult Spanish training for English-speaking parents with children in Atkinson's Spanish Immersion Program.
- Computers and wireless connection. Free Geek, a local non-profit organization, has offered to provide free computers to the community center and to set up a secure wireless connection to the school district computer server and all its multi-lingual literacy materials.
- Space for confidential meetings. Currently, when public and social service agency representatives need to talk with a student and parents they have no place to go in the school building to have a confidential conversation. These meetings could take place in meeting rooms at the project facility.
- Space to expand Atkinson's community lending library of children's books and the school's home garden produce exchange program.
- Redesign of the now-dangerous school crossing across Division St. As part of the Division Vision planning process underway, the Portland Office of Transportation has offered to examine ways to reengineer the crossing to increase safety for kids and adults crossing to and from the school.
- Expansion of environmental outdoor classroom activities, through involving students in the design, implementation, and maintenance of storm water and other environmental features on the site.

Benefits to Neighborhood/Community: Local community members have long desired a community gathering place where people can get to know each other, learn about and become involved in their community, and build stronger social and civic capital in the community. No such community gathering place currently exists in the area. Existing community groups often have difficulty finding space to meet. The proposed project would provide:

- Gathering and meeting space for neighborhood associations and other community groups to hold meetings, present speakers, and hold workshops.
- A central location where people can find out about and get involved in community activities
- Possible future location for affordable office incubator space and/or affordable housing on one or more upper floors.
- Educational opportunity to model innovative environmental design features, such as storm water management (e.g. bioswales, eco roofs, etc.) The City of Portland Bureau of Environmental Services has offered grants and technical assistance to develop these features on the property.

Broader Community Benefits: This proposed project will serve as a model for community-driven revitalization as envisioned by the current, broad-based community planning process for Division Street, known as "Division Vision." The primary Division Vision goals include:

- Stronger relationships in our community by nurturing the connection between the diverse group of folks and communities that make Division Street a unique area.
- Looking for ways to preserve some sense of affordability while enhancing quality of life, and honoring the history of this community.
- A walkable and pedestrian friendly community that emphasizes slowing traffic down, multi-

- modal forms of transportation and a more aesthetic streetscape.
- A vibrant locally oriented economy that supports locally owned businesses. Appropriate zoning for businesses and residential properties, with a focus on serving the needs of the immediate neighborhood.
- Environmentally sustainable main street with creative stormwater treatment; for example porous pavement, street trees and bio-swales.
- Promoting an ecological design for future developments. The redevelopment and restoration of older buildings.”

Members of the project steering committee also serve on the Division Vision Coalition steering committee and serve on the City of Portland’s Citizen Working Group of the formal planning process currently underway for Division St.. The City of Portland Bureau of Planning has identified the site as a future community activity hub. City planning staff intend to rezone both the 5633 S.E. Division site (currently zoned General Commercial), and the neighboring property housing the Dairy Queen (currently zoned Residential 1000 sq. ft./unit) to Storefront Commercial to allow for more consistent and compatible community-oriented development on both sites.

PROJECT PHASES

We propose three phases for the project: initial property acquisition, environmental cleanup, future site development. We plan to apply for a local Meyer Memorial Trust Planning grant of \$12,000 that we will use to hire a consultant to help us develop a detailed business plan and long-term fundraising plan for future expansion of the site facility.

Phase 1—Property acquisition: The first phase is obtaining site ownership and control. Estimated costs to the community include:

• Payment to U.S. Marshall's for their costs	\$ 8,000
• Multnomah County back property taxes:	\$26,000
• Insurance:	\$ 5,000
• Utilities:	\$ 2,000
• <u>Contingency:</u>	<u>\$12,000</u>
• TOTAL	\$50,000

The fundraising effort is currently underway. Community members raised nearly \$20,000 in the first week and a half of the effort. Community interest in and support for the project is strong. Funds for the initial property acquisition are being raised through:

- direct contacts with individual community members and community businesses who may be able to make larger contributions;
- a broad fundraising appeal to community members through door-to-door contacts, flyers, and electronic distribution through a network of email lists; and
- media exposure through local newspapers and television coverage.

Additional funds, as needed, will be raised through a variety of locally proven fundraising activities including a tour of historical homes, community-benefit nights at local restaurants, an auction and other similar devices. Community members have used these same methods in the past to raise funds for other community projects.

A committee also is being created to begin to work on a long-term capital campaign to raise funds for future redevelopment of the property with an expanded facility that is better able to serve the needs of the community than the existing, small structure on the site. This committee will include a number of skilled and experienced fundraisers from the community—a number of whom work for prominent community charitable foundations in the Portland area.

Initial Use of the Site: The existing structure was most recently used as a mini-market/coffee shop

(from 1999 to 2003). The basic infrastructure for a small community center is in place. Once we have access to the site, we will work with the city, county, and state to determine which permits and further improvements will be necessary to reopen the facility as a community center. Initial operation will be for limited hours structured around the school schedule and other scheduled events and staffed by a core group of community and school volunteers. Likely hours of operation would initially be from 7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., with additional special school/neighborhood events in the evenings.

The initial operation will be managed by volunteers and then by a hired manager. We currently are in discussions with a new non-profit organization “Café au Play” that is looking for a facility in which to offer a gathering place and support services for mom’s with their children—especially single mom’s with low incomes. Partnering with this new organization may be a good fit between their need for a facility and our need for an on-site manager/operator.

We will use our planning grant to hire a consultant to help us develop a short-term business plan to expand the use and usefulness of the existing site. A revenue stream will be generated by sales of beverages and snacks as part of the community center activity and facility rental fees. The scope of the initial use will depend somewhat on the requirements for site access and disruption by the environmental cleanup process.

Phase 2—Environmental Cleanup: The property may involve up to four potentially leaking underground fuel tanks from a former gas station operation. Phase I and Phase II environmental assessments (completed by the City of Portland Bureau of Environmental Services(BES)) identified a possible \$200,000 worth of needed cleanup work. The Phase II assessment found that contamination levels are well below EPA residential standards.

Steering committee members are working closely with environmental staff from the City of Portland Bureau of Environmental Services (BES) and the Oregon State Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) to develop a formal, legal agreement—known as a “Prospective Purchaser Agreement”—under which DEQ will not hold SEUL liable for the environmental cleanup. The agreement will clarify that the existing environmental investigation clarifies that no immediate threat to human health or the environment exists on the site. As part of the agreement, SEUL will enter the DEQ voluntary cleanup program and cleanup the site. The City of Portland Brownfield Cleanup Coordinator and Environmental Assessment Manager are working with the steering committee to develop the most efficient cleanup strategy.

A number of funding sources are available for the cleanup. The Oregon Economic and Community Development Department has offered a matching grant of \$50,000 toward the cleanup cost. The steering committee will work with BES staff to apply for an EPA community brownfield cleanup grant (up to \$250,000) in October 2005. Steering committee members also are working with a insurance archeologist who has identified possible additional funding from insurance policies that were in effect when the property was operated as a gas station. We have contacts with local environmental cleanup firms and will attempt to obtain in-kind contributions of some of the cleanup activities.

This project offers an excellent example of how a community group can work with government to cleanup a contaminated site and make it available for community use. Careful documentation of the process will provide valuable information to other community groups interested in pursuing similar projects. Steering committee members tentatively are scheduled to make a formal presentation on the project to a national brownfields conference this fall.

Phase 3—Future Expansion: The community vision for the site includes future demolition of the existing structure and construction of a larger, multi-use facility that will provide a range of services to the school and neighborhood communities.

Lead staff from Opsis Architects and Greenworks, a local environmental design firm currently are donating their time to develop preliminary conceptual drawings and informational materials for

fundraising based on input from the April 2005 community design workshop for the site. They also are providing assistance in preparing a strategy to reach out to private developers and community development corporations to find a partner for the future redevelopment project. Fortunately, Portland is home to a number of individuals and organizations with experience in innovative, community-oriented development.

The Steering Committee plans to use the planning grant to develop a detailed development plan and fundraising strategy. This site offers a unique set of benefits that we expect will be attractive to foundations and donors interested in school and community development projects.

Formal Letters of Support for the Project:

- Atkinson Elementary School PTA
- Mt. Tabor Neighborhood Association
- South Tabor Neighborhood Association
- Richmond Neighborhood Association
- Hosford Abernathy Neighborhood Association
- Southeast Uplift Neighborhood Program, Inc.
- Division Vision Coalition Steering Committee members
- Multnomah County Commissioners Lisa Naito and Maria Rojo de Steffey.

Additional support for the project has been expressed by: Portland City Commissioner Sam Adams, U.S. Congressman Earl Blumenauer, Oregon State Representative Steve March, Metro Councilor Robert Liberty (Metro is the Portland area's elected regional government).

Contact for More Information:

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